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SUBJ

REF HK240732 HONG KONG AFP ENGLISH 240720--PHILIPPINES: ILETO
RESIGNATION DUE TO MILITARY POLICY ON NPA

take 1 of 2--philippines: Ileto's Insurgency Policy Praised

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Manila PHILIPPINE DAILY GLOBE in English 24 Jan 88 pp 4, 5
(tentative)

["Free Fire" column by Teodoro L. Locsin Jr: "The Age
of Iron"]

[Text] He founded the Rangers--that fierce, broadly built, blackclad, tightly-knit band of soldiers, honed razor-sharp to kill and brutally trained to be constantly on the move until they had run down their quarry however long it took. The Rangers had brought down the first Huk Rebellion, under the direct officership of Rocky Ileto. He himself had gone in for hands-on experience in counterinsurgency, leading the Rangers in one scorching firefight after another--with a hunting knife, his nephews tell me, the sparks flying off as blade hit skull making witnesses believe that he was firing off a gun. The stuff of legend. This was in the '50s. Rocky Ileto was and would ever remain the model soldier.

In the last days of the Republic, before Dictator-to-be Ferdinand Marcos snuffed out its life, he was the most-decorated general in the AFP [Armed Forces of the Philippines], at least the general who undoubtedly deserved all his decorations; tall, ram-rod, tight-lipped, taciturn, with a contemptuous distant look in his eyes, as though seeing the reality of the Rangers as the model army receded irrevocably into the past.

He was rumored to have leaked out Oplan [Operation Plan] Sagittarius, the masterplan for the imposition of martial law; for, along with General Manuel Yan (now undersecretary of foreign affairs), he had unequivocally drawn the line between his duty to the flag and the Constitution and the soldier's loyalty to the Commander in Chief. at any rate, he made it clear that Martial Law and the destruction of the Republic, which General and President had sworn to defend, were nowhere among his duties to perform.

The day martial law was announced, it was rumored that General Ileta had been arrested. There was a rumor later that he would be brought to Corregidor, along with everyone in the Maximum Security Block in Fort Bonifacio, to be shot. It didn't happen out he was soon on his way to Teheran, as ambassador, out of harm's way and away from the opportunity to do mischief if only because his professional example was a rebuke to the other AFP generals who were digging into the personal satisfactions of martial rule.

A visitor to the maximum Security Block was told by a buck private: "If Ileta gives his signal, we will turn our guns on our generals and on Marcos. He is the only real soldier."

Throughout the frustrating and despairing years of Martial Law, rumors floated back from Teheran and then from Bangkok that Ileta would return and rescue the armed forces from the mire of shame and degradation in which it was wallowing like a herd of Gadarene swine.

Never happened. He was as closely watched as any of the traditional oppositionists. Still, concerned Filipinos would not miss the opportunity to detour to Bangkok and sound him out on his plans, and on his views about the country's slide to self-destruction.

EDSA [Epifanio de los Santos Avenue] gave the country freedom, and Enrile. It was a package deal. And the package contained both democracy and a time-bomb, with Enrile's irrepressible ambition as the detonator. The best the Cory government could do was appoint Rocky as deputy minister of defense, hoping that his professional example would shame the RAM [Reform the Armed Forces Movement] into good behavior.

It didn't work. The RAM challenged legitimate authority in the name of professionalism in four coup attempts or conspiracies, until Cory threw out Enrile in a coup of her own, the morning after the coup he had not planned. foisted on his own petard. [as published] Cory installed Ileta immediately.

It was observed that before that, Rocky walked with a stoop and a tired gait, as if the years had taken their toll. But when Cory turned to him and said, "Rocky, Enrile is out. You are Defense Minister," the color returned to his cheeks, his torso straightened and he snapped a salute. Here was a man whose life was service, whose energy was dedication to a vision of soldiering he himself had lived.

But the AFP's politicization had advanced farther than either had feared. The AFP proved impervious to Ileta's example and indifferent to his vision of the soldier as pure fighting machine: constantly on the move, eschewing mechanical transport but combing the bush on foot and killing everything that carried a gun or a pamphlet. He was heard to say that the military camps should be deemphasized. The soldier should live off his knapsack and should look to rest from his marching and killing only after he had devoured all the NPAs into the sea where they could be shot like fish in a barrel.

(more) 24 jan

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